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BROWNBACK HOLDS HEARING ON EXTREMIST MOVEMENTS, TERRORIST THREATS

WASHINGTON – U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, today chaired a hearing on ‘Extremist Movements and Their Threat to the United States’.

“It is clear that the U.S. needs a coherent and comprehensive policy to deal with extremism,” Brownback said. “In addition to facing the existing terrorist threat, we need to be looking ahead and thinking about how to turn around what looks like a steeper and steeper slide into anti-western extremism in certain parts of the world.

“There is a certain conventional wisdom gaining currency among experts that state sponsorship of terrorism has disappeared and that instead, the U.S. faces loosely-knit independent actors who are not beholden or answerable to any foreign government. Thus we have a Saudi national who once lived in the Sudan, based out of Afghanistan mounting terrorist attacks on U.S. installations in Africa. Who is to blame?

“It is my firm belief that while we may not see states specifically planning and orchestrating terrorist attacks on the U.S., countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria and the Sudan can all be counted as state sponsors of terrorism because they provide safe-haven to terrorists; they allow the operation of terrorist training camps; they allow terrorists access to funds and may well facilitate their travel around the world.

“Then there is the second tier of states: aiders and abettors. These are states which are otherwise friendly to the U.S. but are unwilling or unable to take the necessary steps to crack down on members of their government or on their citizens who are providing financial and logistical support to terrorist groups. Without such states, it would be infinitely more difficult for terrorists such as Osama Bin Laden to operate.

“Take, for example, the case of Saudi Arabia: If last week’s USA Today article is accurate, significant funds are being funneled to Bin Laden from private citizens in Saudi Arabia. The Saudis are good friends, but permitting this sort of thing is absolutely unacceptable. The Saudis have the responsibility to exert more financial control. We undertook to work with Saudi Arabia to protect their interests when they were threatened, but this is a two way street.

“I am also worried about what appears to be a tacit compact between the Clinton Administration and the Saudis not to finger Iran for the Khobar Towers bombing. There seems to be a tendency to play down and even whitewash the involvement of certain states with terrorist groups: Syria, Lebanon, Iran and others. Another case in point is Iraq (Ambassador Sheehan, I have seen reports that Bin Laden has either been in Iraq or is contemplating setting up operations in Iraq. I hope you will address this). I must confess that I continue to be disappointed in the administration’s failure to match action to rhetoric in the case of Iraq. We are not moving nearly aggressively enough to remove Saddam Hussein.

“In a nutshell, the Iraq question, the Iran question, Osama bin Laden, are challenges to U.S. leadership, and are symptoms of a phenomenon with which we must deal. As a nation, we cannot afford to tiptoe around this problem, we need a strong and comprehensive policy for dealing with this threat,” Brownback said.

Testifying at the hearing today were the Honorable Michael Sheehan, Ambassador at Large and Coordinator for Counter terrorism, Department of State; Mr. Mansoor Ijaz, Managing Partner, Crescent Equity Partners; Mr. Milt Bearden, retired CIA Officer and former CIA chief in Sudan and Pakistan; and Dr. S. Frederick Starr, Chairman of the Central Asia Caucasus Institute, Johns Hopkins University.